

# Upper Penitencia Creek

Originating high on Poverty Ridge in the eastern foothills, Upper Penitencia Creek plunges into Cherry Flat Reservoir, and then meanders through Alum Rock Park. The lovely Arroyo Aguague joins the stream deep within the Park. Below the gates of the Park, Upper Penitencia Creek winds through the Berryessa and Alum Rock neighborhoods, a narrow ribbon of tall trees, cool water, and bird song. Not far from the Santa Clara County fairgrounds, our stream joins the mighty Coyote Creek -- the longest stream and largest watershed in Santa Clara County. Not far from Alviso, Coyote Creek flows through the estuary to San Francisco Bay.

## What is a watershed?

A watershed is the land surrounding a stream or river. A watershed includes the whole valley up to the ridgeline. All the rain water that is not soaked up is shed by this land and runs off into the stream or river which runs through it. No matter where you live, you live in a watershed, and your actions can influence the health of your local creek.



The California Tiger Salamander has disappeared from many of our local watersheds, and has recently been listed as a "threatened species" by the federal government. These rare and beautiful salamanders still lurk in the hidden valleys of the upper watershed.



Upper Penitencia Creek and its associated fields and ponds offer many opportunities for graceful and lovely herons and egrets to forage for frogs, fish, and other tasty morsels.



Red-shouldered hawks often breed along streams. Red-shouldered hawk nests have been observed high in the eucalyptus trees along Upper Penitencia Creek. Known for their vocal displays and soaring flight, a pair of red-shouldered hawks may use the same territory for many years.



Native trees such as cottonwood, sycamore and oak are an essential part of the stream ecosystem. Their spreading boughs shade the creek and keep it cool through the summer months. Tangled roots fringe the edges of deep pools, sheltering frogs and salamanders. Fallen leaves from these trees provide food and shelter for the insect larvae that sustain the trout and other denizens of the streams. Streamside trees, often the tallest trees in the area, provide nesting places for many species of birds. Shrubs and berries feed birds and small mammals.



Rainbow trout are excellent indicators of a healthy stream. They rely on cold, clean water, shaded by native trees and shrubs for shelter and food. Trout can still be found on our creek, providing us with good cause to protect this special place.

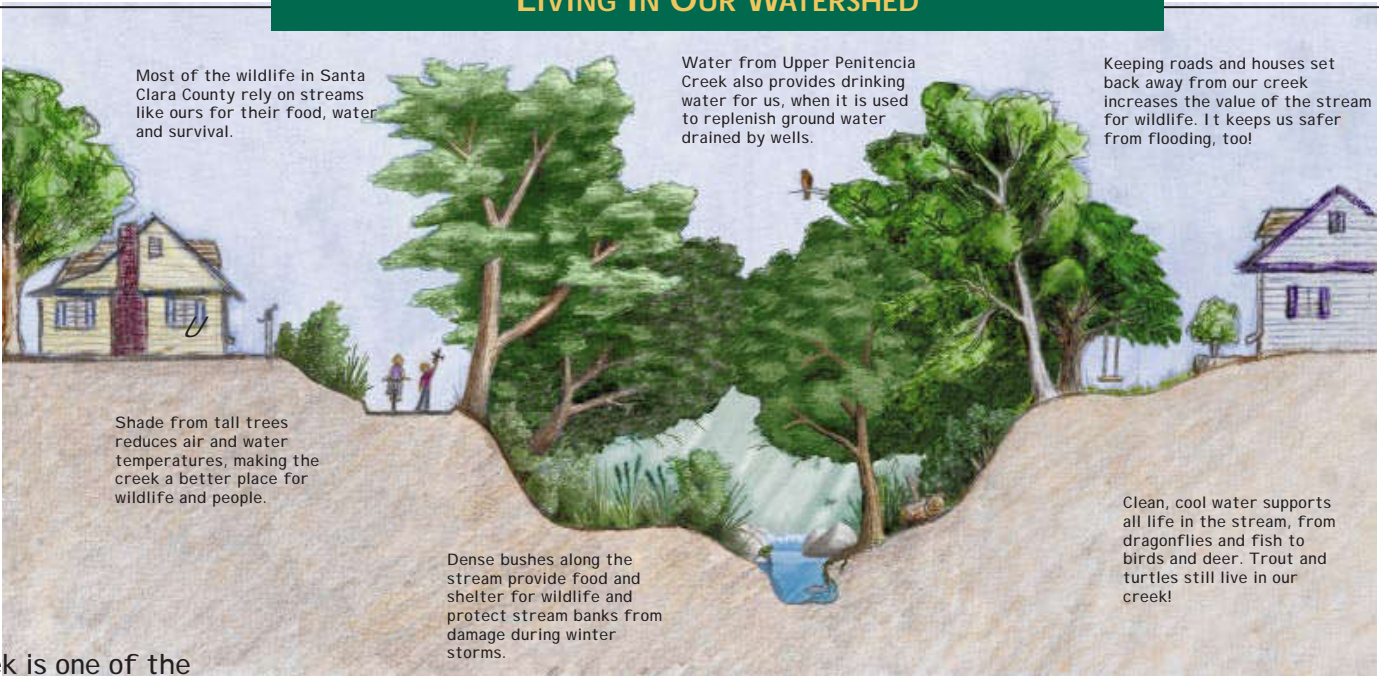
Upper Penitencia Creek is a ribbon of wilderness that flows through our neighborhoods. It provides safe shelter, food, and transport to the many birds, frogs, fish and other animals that share our valley. It is also an important resource for people too. A healthy creek provides beauty, recreation, relaxation, and a place to learn more about the natural systems that surround us.

Upper Penitencia Creek is one of the healthiest streams in the South Bay. Keeping it that way is up to us. To keep it healthy, we need to keep it natural and clean.

Keeping it natural means giving it the space it needs to flow and planting native trees and shrubs. When houses or other developments are built too close to the creek, it robs the creek of the ability to go through its natural cycles. We also need to use native plants in our gardens and landscaping that are near the creek. This provides even more habitat for the local birds, and helps to keep non-native plants from invading the Penitencia Creek ecosystem.

Keeping it clean means protecting it from dirt, pesticides, motor oil, and other chemicals.

## LIVING IN OUR WATERSHED



Soil gets into the creek from bare creek banks, and from construction sites that do not use proper soil management. Pesticides, and other chemicals get into the creek through misuse and through rainfall runoff of paved surfaces.

You can help keep the creek safe by using pesticides and other chemicals sparingly, and making sure loose soil and

left-over chemicals, such as motor oil, aren't washed off your property. Anything that washes into the streets flows through storm-drains and into the creek.

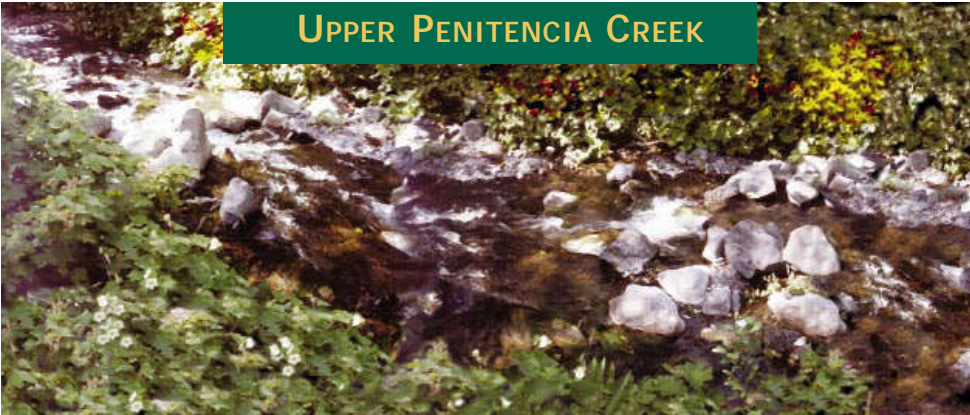
If you see any spills or potential threats to the health of the creek please report it immediately to the City of San Jose Environmental Services Department at (408) 945-3000.

Finally, don't forget to visit the creek and enjoy its beauty.

When non-native "invasive" plants encroach into the riparian corridor from adjacent landscaping, its value is reduced, and some of our wildlife may disappear. If you live near the stream, you can help by avoiding the use of these invaders in landscaping. If they already occur on your property, be especially careful not to allow yard clippings to be washed into the stream, as they may take hold downstream, spreading the invasion throughout the watershed:

Giant Reed (Arundo Donax)	Ivy	Tree of Heaven (Ailanthis)
Periwinkle (Vinca)	Pampas Grass	Scotch Broom
Acacia	Eucalyptus	Tamarisk
Black Locust	Bamboo	Ornamental Blackberry

## UPPER PENITENCIA CREEK



## FLOWING THROUGH TIME

Children have been playing along the banks of Upper Penitencia Creek for thousands of years. The Ohlone people called the land around our stream Shistuk, which means "Place of Rabbits." This was a good place for the Ohlone to hunt and gather food.

The early Spanish settlers named the stream "Ahwah-hey" meaning a place to water cattle and horses. On the long hot days of summer, children and their families would cool off in the deep pools in what is now Alum Rock Park.

In the 1700s, Franciscan Padres from Mission San Jose and Mission Santa Clara met with Ohlone converts in a small adobe hut where they did penance. Thus the stream was named Penitencia Creek.

As farming became more intensive in the valley, Penitencia Creek became an important source of irrigation water. One farmer plowed a channel to divert the water to his fields south of the creek. This split the creek into two streams--Upper Penitencia Creek, which now flows from the hills above Alum Rock Park to Coyote Creek near the San Jose Flea Market, and Lower Penitencia Creek which flows from the neighborhoods north of Berryessa through Milpitas to Coyote Creek near Dixon Landing Road.

Children still play on Penitencia Creek, and our creek still has a lot to offer. On warm summer afternoons, the shade is cool and the water is deep. Frogs and fish, birds and butterflies are all there, if you look. Each week, students come to study the creek, in the hope that we can do a better job of taking care of the creek for future generations of children.



## MAKING THE CONNECTION

To report a potentially hazardous spill or pollution incident, call 911 or:  
City of San Jose Environmental Services Department  
(weekdays 8am to 5pm).....(408) 945-3000  
California Hazardous Material Spill/Release  
(24 hours) .....(800) 852-7550

To find out about hazardous material recycling programs:  
Santa Clara Household Hazardous Waste  
Program.....(408) 299-7300

For more information on pollution prevention:  
City of San Jose Environmental Services Department  
(weekdays 8am to 5pm).....(408) 945-3000

To report abandoned pets:  
Humane Society of Santa Clara County.....(408) 727-6529

To report injured/orphaned wildlife:  
Wildlife Center of Silicon Valley .....(408) 283-0744

For more information on getting involved with keeping Upper Penitencia Creek healthy, call:

Coyote Creek Riparian Station  
To ask for the Streamside Planting Guide or become a  
volunteer.....(408) 262-9204

Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society  
Ask about the Backyard Bird Sanctuary Program . (408) 252-3747

Santa Clara Valley Water District  
Ask for the Stream Care Guide .....(408) 265-2600

Friends of Upper Penitencia Creek  
Citizens' group protecting water quality and stream  
ecology.....(408) 377-3811



## DISCOVERING UPPER PENITENCIA CREEK

An invitation to explore your creek from the Friends of Upper Penitencia Creek (by Kevin Tso of the Friends of Upper Penitencia Creek)

Upper Penitencia Creek is one of the most prominent natural features of the North Valley. Yet many people are not familiar with the miles of hiking trails and two beautiful lakes along the length of the creek.

The first trail begins at a footbridge on King Road between Berryessa and Mabury. The dirt trail runs along the creek until it reaches Mabury at Educational Park Road--the south side of the creek is hike-able. A little further east on Mabury, you will reach Penitencia County Park. There is a small lake teeming with ducks and fish. Jogging trails lead to the entrance at Jackson Ave and Mossdale Way. Just across Jackson, another segment of the trail picks up, passing under Hwy 680 to Capitol Ave.

At Capitol Ave and Penitencia Creek Road, the trail winds through a large grassy meadow. This is a nice piece of nature in the middle of the big city. For bridge-lovers, there is a footbridge spanning the trail.

At the corner of Penitencia Creek Road and Viceroy Way, crossing Penitencia Creek Road, you will enter Penitencia Creek Park. Taking the path closest to the creek, you will pass the lake in the middle which has many types of fish and waterfowl, and you may even see an egret. There are parking lots and restrooms, so it is the ideal place to park and hike. Along the way you will see a footbridge on the right. That route continues west on Penitencia Creek Road. There is an entrance to an underpass that crosses White Road. It's a little dark in there. From the corner of White and Penitencia Creek Road, you can follow Penitencia Creek Road all the way to Alum Rock Park. This is a favorite route for bicyclists.

A couple of percolation ponds are also available in the area for access. Go north from White and Penitencia Creek Road, and then go west on Noble Ave. They are right across from Noble School. This is an area where many people fish.

It is important to preserve the naturalness of the creek and enhance its accessibility. What a great feeling it is to enjoy nature in a big city!